THE ELDERS and MESSENGERS OF THE SEVERAL BAPTIST CHURCHES, MEETING AT

Kingsbridge, Exon, Tiverton, Prescott, Wellington, Loughwood, Upottery, Bicknell, Lyme, Chard, Yeovil, Horsington, Croscomb, Broadmead and *Pithay*, BRISTOL, *Bradford, Frome*, and *Cheltenham*: having received letters also from *Plymouth, Ford, Cullumpton, Stoke-Gomer, Horsly, Sodbury, Melksham, Trowbridge, Bratton, Crockerton, Paulton, Grittleton* and *Malmsbury*, and *Sarum*: being met in association at *Yeovil, May* 24 and 25, 1774, to the several churches they represent send Christian salutation.

Dearly beloved BRETHREN,

THROUGH divine goodness we have once more had the pleasure of meeting together according to our annual appointment and custom, for the professed purposes of engaging in the public worship of God, enquiring into the state of the associated Churches, conferring on such matters as they propose for our consideration, spreading their several cases before the divine throne, and offering you a word of advice.—We opened this our annual service, by addressing him who alone could bless *your* letters to us or *ours* to you. We trust we have more than read your letters, we have in some measure felt their miscellaneous contents, and find they contain matter both of gratitude and grief.—The removal of some from the churches by death, is one of the most agreeable ways wherein they could be separated from us, for though some of us have hereby been deprived of our dearest earthly comforts, yet as hereby

hereby neither the Lord, nor his cauſe is diſhonoured, and as hereby our dear departed Chriſtian friends are entered into reſt, we dare not call the article of death in your letters the worſt intelligence in them; no, we think the accounts which we have had of ſpiritual deadneſs, immoralities, and excommunications, are juſter occaſions of lamentation and mourning. However, ſome other parts of your letters have been to us like cold water to a thirſty ſoul, inaſmuch as they tell us of a general enjoyment of peace, of your regard for the fundamental truths of the goſpel, and of many poor periſhing ſinners having felt the quickening influence of divine grace on their hearts, To as that thereby they have been brought home to the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the good and chief Shepherd of ſouls, and have entered by him into his ſheepfold. May a ſenſe of theſe different events, related in your letters, be deeply impreſſed upon, and ſanctified to your and our minds! And now, to this our prayer, give us leave to ſubjoin our affectionate caution and advice. And firſt, beware of hypocriſy. An hypocrite in Zion is a wicked perſon, in a godly man's cloaths. To ſuch we would ſay, your face is towards Zion, but your heart towards ſin. You love and ſeek your honor before men, more than your innocence before God. You know you cannot make the Lord think well of you while ſinning, and you alſo know that the eſteem of your fellow profeſſors will avail you nothing at the laſt day. One of theſe two things is your immediate duty (viz.) either to drop your ſinful practices, or your religious character. There is nothing covered that ſhall not be revealed, neither can any one proſper who covereth his ſin; although for your repentance be it known, that whoſoever confeſſeth and forſaketh it, ſhall have mercy—In the next place we would addreſs unhappy backſliders. You who either have fallen under ſome degree of church cenſure for ſome public irregularities, or elſe have ſecretly declined in perſonal intercourſe with the Lord; and in performing the work of the cloſet. Perhaps the carnal eaſe and gratification of your body may have been hereby obtained, but it is more

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than probable that leanneſs at the ſame time has taken place in your ſoul. Senſual indulgences coſt a backſliding Chriſtian ſomething more valuable than money. They coſt him his credit and uſefulneſs as a profeſſor of religion, as alſo the peace of his conſcience, and the growth of grace in his ſoul. In ſhort, the carnality of a believer occaſions the loſs of his manhood in religion, it greatly weakens his ſtrength, and it deprives him of courage for God. Profeſſors conformity to this world in their paſtimes, their tables, and dreſs, has recorded many of their names among bankrupts, both in the church and ſtate. Conſider then from whence, and by what you have fallen, and may the forgiving looks of the compaſsionate redeemer, conſtrain you to go out from your carnal companions and practices, and weep bitterly!

To you whoſe minds are haunted with horrid propoſals to ſin either in matters of faith or of practice, permit us to ſay, if theſe temptations *diſtreſs* you, they are not likely to *deſtroy* you; for though Satan's deſign in tempting you may be your endleſs ruin, yet the Lord's deſign in permitting his people to be tempted, is often to make them more ſkilful in the uſe of their armour, and to glorify the power of his own grace. Many a temptation though it was deſigned by Satan to draw a Chriſtian from God, yet the Lord has made it the very mean of bringing him near to his ſeat; and as one ſays, "A Chriſtian generally fights beſt on his knees."—Think not that your temptations are ſuch as no real Chriſtian feels, for it has been found that thoſe perſons who have been moſt eminent for grace, have alſo been moſt eminently tempted. Loving the leaſt ſin is a much greater evidence of a graceleſs ſtate, than feeling the moſt horrid temptations. Thoſe are our worſt enemies which moſt oppoſe our holineſs, not thoſe which only diſtreſs our minds. If under the buffetings of Satan you, like Paul, betake yourſelves to Chriſt, you will alſo, like him, in the iſſue, receive that grace which is ſufficient for you, and will ſhortly ſee Satan bruiſed under your feet: for God is faithful who hath promiſed, he alſo will do it.

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Are you troubled with irreligious relations? This is often the lot of the righteous. It is your mercy you are not like them, and it was ſovereign grace alone, that made you to differ; and if their impiety and unkindneſs be over-ruled for your living leſs upon creatures, and more upon the Lord, it is a ſign that he has turned the curſe into a bleſſing to you. Return malice and curſing, with pity and prayer; for the prayers of good people for the converſion of their thoughtleſs and ſinful relations, have ſometimes been anſwered after they themſelves have been in heaven.

Are you exerciſed with bodily weakneſs and pain? Probably this is needful for your deeper conviction of the demerit of ſin, and for your having your thoughts more fixed upon death and a future ſtate.

Are you poor as to this world? Poverty in a profeſſor if connected with honeſty, is no diſgrace to religion, nor evidence of the divine diſpleaſure towards the ſoul.-The whole univerſe is your Father's, Believer, but his wiſdom ſees your preſent ſtraitened circumſtances to be ſafeſt for you. It is much better to be walking in hunger and rags towards heaven, than in luxury and pomp towards hell. Afflictive providences are uſually uſeful to believers ſouls. The nurſe ſometimes puts wormwood to the breaſt, in order to wean the child from it, ſo the Lord imbitters the world to his people to wean them from that.

Endeavour to live upon Chriſt—Let his divinity be adored, and his mediation embraced. Let life be expected from him, and let life be conſecrated to him. He who is all in our ſalvation, ſhould be all in our care. We can have no peace but from him, and we ſhould have no pleaſure but for him. —Labour to know and feel more of the peculiar truths of the goſpel, for this not only tends to prevent inſtability and ficklenes, but alſo unholineſs of heart and of life; for as that great divine Dr. *Owen* ſays, "Sanctification is the influence of truth through the bleſſing of God on the mind of man." —Diſtruſt, ponder, and regulate all the clamorous demands of the outward man. Be not haſty to obey

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it. Much greater pleaſure ſometimes ariſes from a ſtern denial than a fond indulgence of it. Self-mortification has more of a heavenly ſuperſcription upon it than ſelf-gratification, and though the latter may excite moſt carnal pleaſure in proſpect, yet the former yields moſt in reflection.--Think not lightly of what is the ſubject of meditation. The thoughts ſometimes ſtrangely defile the mind, unfit it for the reſidence of the Holy Ghoſt, and dangerouſly diſpoſe it for overt acts of ſin; but whenever any peculiar propenſity towards ſin be diſcovered, let that be deemed a time of preſſing need of reſtraining grace, and let nothing prevent an immediate application to the Lord for it. Expect nothing from your own heart but ſin, for this will be attended with the leaſt diſappointment, and one would think be preventive of pride and ſelf-confidence.

In the cloſet endeavour to think of the Lord when you either ſpeak to him, or read of him there. Our ſecret prayers are often haſty in the morning, and ſleepy in the evening, entered upon with reluctance, performed with careleſſneſs, and cloſed with forgetfulneſs. Meer converſe with duties themſelves is inſipid, and in ſome ſenſe uſeleſs, but *converſe* with God in them is delightful and quickening.—— Let each member of a church endeavour to be one of the commendable few who *begin* the public worſhip of the Lord's houſe and day, and let not your cauſeleſs departure diſturb thoſe who chuſe to ſtay till the *whole ſervice* is ended. And remember that a place ſet apart for divine worſhip is not a very proper one for folding the hands to ſleep, nor for exceſſive dreſs, gazing, and compliments. It is ſaid of Col. *Gardiner*, that he paid no compliments to fellow creatures during his attendance on divine worſhip.—If you will do any thing for your miniſters, be entreated to *pray* for them, and that not only when your miniſters hear you, but in private. Secret and fervent prayers for your miniſters are ſome of your beſt favors towards them, and ſome of the beſt evidences of your being the real friends of Zion.—Let the peace of a church be ever eſteemed as one of its moſt precious bleſſings, for though truth ſhould ever be

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preferred to peace, yet even truth itſelf is not likely to profit without peace, and in order to promote peace we had need among other things to watch againſt *ſelf-will* and *backbiting*. It ſhould not only be known that a perſon is a profeſſor of religion by his name being regiſtered in the church-book, or by his ſtaying at private church-meetings, but it ſhould alſo be known by his ſpeech and deportment in the family and the world. And let love from the heart be exerciſed towards profeſſors of all denominations.

The national affairs ſhould be thought of and ſpread before the Lord, that the kingdom may not be divided againſt itſelf, and that the unhappy differences ſubſiſting between the Mother country and her American colonies may be accommodated without ſhedding of blood.——In your letters, the diſtreſſes of the poor are juſtly and affectionately taken notice of, and ſo let them be alſo in your ſolemn addreſſes to the Lord, for from him alone relief can come. It is lamentable that while poverty ſo much abounds among the labouring people, drunkenneſs ſuperabounds, but we would not ſuppoſe that this evil is chargeable upon any of you whom we now addreſs, for though many of you are poor as to this world's goods, yet we truſt you are of them who are not only choſen to inherit a kingdom in the world to come, but alſo while here to be rich in faith and good works. And now, dear brethren, we conclude this our annual epiſtle, with our earneſt wiſhes and prayers that you may be kept by the power of God unto eternal ſalvation, and that we may meet you, together with all the redeemed of the Lord, on mount Zion above, and for ever unite with you in celebrating the high praiſes of him who hath called us to his kingdom and glory. Amen!

Signed at the requeſt, and on the behalf of the whole aſſembly, by

HUGH EVANS, Moderator.

BREVIATES.

TUESDAY afternoon brother *L. Pitt* began the meeting in prayer, brother *H. Evans* was choſen moderator, the preliminaries of the aſſociation and the letters from the churches were read, brother *Kingdon* was deſired to draw up the *General Letter*, and the meeting was cloſed in prayer by brother *Sotteridge*.

Early on Wedneſday morning, our brethren, *Whitchurch*, *Allſop*, *Wyke*, and *Pyne*, improved time in prayer, the General Letter was read, approved, and ſigned, and the meeting concluded by our brother *S. Dunſcombe*.

The public meeting was opened at 10, by brother *Kingdon*, brother *Day* followed in prayer, a ſermon was then preached by our brother *H. Evans*, from *Iſai.* li. 9. *Awake, awake, put on ſtrength, O arm of the Lord*; and the ſervice was cloſed by him in prayer.

In the afternoon the meeting was opened by our brother *Sprague*, brother *Lewis* ſucceeded, a ſermon was then preached by our brother *Tommas*, from 2 *Cor.* iii. 9. *For if the miniſtration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the miniſtration of righteouſneſs exceed in glory*: and the meeting was cloſed by him in prayer.

Several affairs were then conſidered, and it was AGREED, *nemine contradicente*,——That the hearty and affectionate thanks of this aſſociation be preſented to the Committee for managing the LATE APPLICATIONS to Parliament for the enlargement of the toleration act, and the eſtabliſhment of religious liberty upon a truly proteſtant foundation; for the zeal and activity they have already exerciſed in promoting this great and deſirable object, and their firmneſs in the reſolutions they have formed and made public, ſtill to purſue it.

That we alſo join with our brethren in *Wales*, in acknowledging our great obligations to Sir *Harry Houghton*, and thoſe other honorable and noble members of the legiſlature, who favored and promoted this application in both houſes of parliament.

And further, That we are ready to unite in any

future

future application that may be made relative to this important object, and moſt earneſtly hope ſuch application will be crowned with ſucceſs.

Agreed, to recommend days of ſolemn humiliation and prayer as heretofore.

Agreed, to hold the next aſſociation at *Bradford*, Wilts, on the Tueſday and Wedneſday in the Whitſun week, (to begin Tueſday afternoon three o'clock,) and that our brethren *C. Evans* and *Day* preach the ſermons, or in caſe of the failure of either our brother *Francis*.

The aſſociation was cloſed in prayer, as uſual, by the moderator.

State of the aſſociated Churches this year, as follows.

Baptized	122
Received by letter	9
Reſtored	1
	132
Dead	37
Diſmiſſed	8
Excluded	2
	47
Increaſe	85

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